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# Economic and Social Council

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**Commission for Social Development**
Thirty-sixth session
10-20 February 1998
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups**

## Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The growth of the global older population, citizens who are living longer productive lives, is considered one of the most challenging demographic trends of the twenty-first century. A steady stream of 1 million persons a month now crosses the threshold of age 60; and 80 per cent of them are in developing countries. The total number of those aged 60 and above is projected to reach 600 million by the year 2001 and go on to reach 1.2 billion by the year 2025, when over 70 per cent of them will be living in what are today's developing countries. These numbers illustrate a far-reaching, if quiet, demographic revolution now affecting the social and economic structures of societies.

For all countries, the foremost challenge lies in identifying and supporting the new opportunities for older persons and the benefits for society that arise from viewing older persons as a resource rather than a burden. Older persons have self-reliance and the potential for making contributions to their families and communities and, by means of these contributions, for improving the quality of life *for all* in a sustainable manner. To fulfil this potential, older persons must have access to adequate resources to meet basic needs and must be incorporated into decision-making processes.

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Commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development specifically refers to the promotion of social integration by fostering those activities that ensure the full participation of all generations in society. The International Federation on Ageing, on behalf of the NGO Committee on Ageing, proposes the following actions to enable older persons to have full partnership in their communities and in society:

(a) Governments and civil society should invest in their elderly, who are a valuable and productive resource in all societies with a wealth of knowledge, skills, diverse cultural heritages and lifelong experiences, which must be utilized to enable societies to accommodate themselves to the unprecedented population shift referred to above. Social development will benefit from the substantive contributions of older persons taking responsibilities in their communities and in society;

(b) Older persons need adequate resources to meet basic needs — namely, accessible health and social services, shelter, adequate income and employment opportunities, including retraining, second careers, and recognition of the value of unpaid as well as paid work, and full participation in society, including decision-making processes;

(c) Respect for every person's dignity and human rights must be upheld to the very end of the life cycle. Media and educational efforts must be directed towards countering negative attitudes and myths regarding ageing, which still persist globally.

We look to the Commission for Social Development to promote social integration, which by its very nature implies the full participation and partnership of all generations in a "society for all ages". This theme for 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, provides an opportunity for Governments and civil society to measure progress in moving towards the objectives we have stated above.

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# Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) strongly urges the Commission for Social Development to explore concomitantly the theme of the International Year for Older Persons (1999), "Towards a society for all ages" and the theme of social integration, in follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

The definition of "social integration" is the act, or process of, integrating equals into society. A "society for all ages" would include individuals of all ages as participants in society. Reality tells us that this vision will be hard to achieve.

One aspect of the realities of the future is changing demographics: the large increase in the numbers of older people, many not only living longer but healthier lives. The challenge to all nations will be to look to the future and to identify potential opportunities for the participation and integration of these legions of older people. They will either contribute to the social and economic well-being of all ages, because they participate and are integrated, or they will be seen as burdens upon society — a result no nation or society can afford.

Social integration, besides building a society for all ages, will require the eradication of current stereotypes — not only of age, but race, gender and religion, or belief. In the

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development of social and economic policies, the voices of all must be heard. Opportunities for financial and economic self-sufficiency must be equally accessible to all. Thus can we achieve social integration and build a society for all ages.

The focus of this session, social integration, and the approach of the International Year of Older Persons, with their common but not identical themes, presents a unique opportunity for the Commission to contribute to the framing of the debate on what is a "society for all ages" as it further defines social integration.

As a contribution to that debate, the American Association of Retired Persons is collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in a worldwide poster competition for the year 1999, in which artists will portray their vision of a "society for all ages".

AARP hopes that the Commission, in its deliberations about social integration, will focus on the reality of changing demographics and will contribute in large measure to the framing of the vision of a "society for all ages". Integration without participation is not possible.

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## Statement submitted by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS) is a coalition of national, regional and local non-profit social service organizations. Its membership consists of over 4,500 multipurpose community organizations operating in 44 countries. Its members' activities at the local level include community development projects, housing sponsorship, and social service programmes for children, youth, the ageing, the disabled, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. At the national and international levels, IFS works in partnership not only with other non-governmental organizations but also with business and labour and the private sector to formulate social policy objectives and measures for the achievement of human rights. IFS is a multicultural organization which seeks to adapt the diverse needs and values of national and local cultures to the issues faced by individuals living in poverty in both rural and urban areas.

IFS wishes to congratulate the Secretariat and the members of the two expert workshops on social integration, participation and protection on the excellent reports that have been prepared for the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-sixth session. They provide a framework for discussion both by the governmental delegates and the

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representatives of non-governmental organizations. IFS is particularly concerned with the development of mechanisms which will facilitate the participation of individuals, as well as non-governmental organizations at all levels, in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

IFS agrees in general with the means and methods for participation described in the expert reports but calls attention to a deficiency in the suggestions. No adequate provision is made for Governments to be encouraged to include in their reports information offered by non-governmental organizations on the activities of their organizations in the planning, operating, monitoring and evaluation of programmes undertaken to implement the outcome of the World Summit. Such reporting would furnish an additional tool to advance the concept of tripartite cooperation of Governments (including local authorities), the private sector and non-governmental organizations. We hope the Commission on Social Development will take this observation into account and invite Governments to include comments from non-governmental organizations in their reports on implementation of the Summit's outcomes.

Mechanisms need to be put in place — and appropriately publicized — which enable individuals and families to make their views known, both at the planning stage and the operating stage. Examples of such mechanisms are regular public hearings at the community level dealing with social services, housing needs etc.; encouragement of the establishment of community associations; and transportation arrangements to facilitate access to governmental authorities. Such mechanisms do not necessarily have to be put into place by Governments alone — in other words, the mechanism itself can be tripartite. IFS believes its experience and its values could make a positive contribution to the development and operation of mechanisms designed to assist individuals and families to become aware of their rights and their responsibilities.

IFS fully supports the call for social impact assessments but notes that there is no consideration of the type of social indicators that would be used in making the assessments. The references to analyses are too general and where indicators are specifically mentioned, they are based on the use of statistical measurements. Non-governmental organizations such as IFS work with social indicators that include interviews with individual recipients of services and team-work analyses of community satisfaction. Such procedures permit the gathering of information and the development of social measurements that lead to more accurate and more equitable assessments. Examples of the use of such social indicators can be found in many current research studies and in the specifications for project evaluation as a condition of foundation grants. Another example of the use of social indicators is the assessment carried out by IFS and its member federations for membership accreditation. We urge the Commission for Social Development to encourage the use and refinement of comprehensive social indicators, based on the experience of non-governmental organizations such as IFS and its constituent members.

IFS appreciates that the expert reports recognize the danger of institutional or corporate interests taking precedence over the interests of the individuals and groups whom they are supposed to serve. IFS welcomes also the emphasis on the human rights approach as a "standard of legitimacy". At the same time IFS is dubious about the undifferentiated values framework which seems to give equal standing to respect for the right to life and the "value" of networks. Networks should be dealt with elsewhere. We hope that the Commission for Social Development will re-examine the values framework not only against the background of the international human rights instruments but also within the concept of the preservation of human dignity.